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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of simulations in the professional development of school leaders. It compares two National Association of Secondary School Principal (NASSP) programs: the "Springfield Development Program" and the "21st Century School Administrator Skills Program" (SAS) and identifies the characteristics of SAS that are aligned with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards. The "Springfield" program was created as a training and development program for assessment-center participants who showed high potential to be effective school leaders. This approach worked well when the number of applicants for school leadership positions exceeded vacant positions. Now that there is a shortage of qualified applicants, a new simulation model is needed, and the SAS program builds on and refines the strengths of the "Springfield" approach. The original "Springfield" skills have been increased to eight, and these skill dimensions are aligned with the ISLLC Standards and the new NASSP Assessment Center Skills. Three skill dimensions remain the same: judgment, organizational ability, and sensitivity. The five new skills are oral communication, organizational ability, results orientation, setting leadership direction, teamwork/team leadership, and written communication. Other refinements to "Springfield," such as on-the-job feedback and simplified participant data, are discussed. (RJM)

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From The *Springfield Development Program* to The *21st Century School Administrator Skills Program (SAS)*

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From The *Springfield Development Program*
to the *21st Century School Administrator Skills Program (SAS)*

Today school administrators face major challenges early in their careers. Gone are the days when a beginning principal could enjoy a honeymoon period before being held accountable. Principals, including beginners, are held responsible for student achievement, school safety, and changing school culture as never before. They often find themselves unemployed if they do not achieve success quickly. For the beginning principal, these new pressures can easily lead to failure.

Our society cannot afford the loss of potentially successful school administrators who fail because needed support and development were missing. A growing shortage of school administrators has been well documented by the Educational Research Service (ERS) study of principal candidate supply and demand. That study, commissioned by the National Associations of Elementary and Secondary School Principals (1998), documented the lack of qualified candidates for vacant school leadership positions. The report also noted an increase in the average age of principals from 46.8 in 1987-88 to 47.7 in 1993-94. When asked if there was a shortage, surplus, or the right number of qualified candidates for the positions filled this year, 50% of the 400 districts surveyed reported there was a shortage. The results were consistent across rural, suburban, and urban districts.

Unfortunately, few districts reported having programs for aspiring principals. Many did report having a formal induction program for new principals. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) through its Office of Professional Development and Assessment has worked with a number of districts during the past

twenty years to develop future school leaders from within the district. A review of the data on the number of qualified candidates in those districts reveals a surplus. Those data seem to justify the conclusion that districts can develop the quality school leadership talent needed to fill future vacancies.

The changes in the expectations of principals have been accompanied by changes in attitudes about professional development. For the first time, state and national standards for school leaders have been developed and are being used for licensure, appraisal, and professional development. (For example, see National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1995; Perreault & Bradshaw, 1998; Shipman & Murphy, 1996.) As a result of the standards movement and high accountability, educators at all levels are asking, "What will I get from attending this training that will help me achieve the goals others have set for me and result in my continued employment or, possibly, a bonus?" Those who provide professional development are also being pressured to respond to these demands and provide professional development programs that address real issues in the context of the school district. Most important of all, the professional development needs of school administrators must be met in a way that keeps them in school as much as possible.

This paper discusses the use of simulations in the professional development of school leaders. It compares two NASSP programs, *Springfield* and the *21st Century School Administrator Skills Program (SAS)*, and identifies the characteristics of *SAS* that are aligned with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards.

Using Simulations for Professional Development

If school districts are to adequately prepare school leaders to face the many challenges they will encounter, it is critical that they provide development opportunities that allow potential candidates to experience the realities of school leadership and build needed skills. On the job training is no longer an option. With some justification, current school leaders have resisted simulations as a useful professional development tool. Some feel that simulating what they experience daily in a development activity is a waste of their time. In addition, the research on adult learning suggests that putting one's behavior on view for peer critique can be threatening. This attitude is unfortunate because the well-designed simulations can support continuing professional development. Simulations create safe environments where a wide variety of conditions and situations can be replicated. The reflection and feedback that results from working through a simulation can be targeted and focused on generic skills that are linked to national and state standards. The focus on generic skills rather than the outcome-based knowledge, dispositions, and performances often found in standards language allows participants to apply the learning across several tasks, responsibilities, and standards. Fortunately, individuals who are not currently serving as administrators or who are just beginning an administrative career are not generally as reluctant to participate in simulation-based professional development. Since they are not expected to know how to be a leader, they see simulations as a way to gain experience without the pressure of being in the hot seat.

The *Springfield Development Program*

The *Springfield Development Program* has proven to be a valuable tool for training school administrators. Feedback from participants has consistently revealed that

the two and one-half-day experience and follow-up work did make a difference in their behavior and skill level (Perreault & Bradshaw, 1998). By allowing participants to examine their level of skill in several areas, set goals for improvement, practice the skills in a safe environment, receive feedback on their performance, and plan on-the-job follow-up, *Springfield* met many of the current professional development criteria. However, with changing conditions facing school leaders now and in the future, there was a clear need to examine the *Springfield* program and make some modifications.

From *Springfield* to *SAS*

The *Springfield Development Program* was created as a training and development program for assessment center participants who showed high potential to be effective school leaders. This rationale worked well when there were more educators who wanted to be school leaders than vacant positions. *Springfield* was used effectively as a tool to develop future school leaders in many school districts both nationally and internationally. The *21st Century School Administrator Skills* (SAS) Program builds on and refines the strengths of the *Springfield Development Program.* Several new features have also been added.

Refinements. One of the most obvious changes in the program is the set of skills that provides the foundation for the training activities. The original *Springfield* skills (decisiveness, judgment, leadership, organizational ability, problem analysis, and sensitivity) are expanded, and the number of skill areas is increased to eight. These skill dimensions are aligned with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards and the new NASSP Assessment Center Skills. Three skill dimensions remain the same: judgment, organizational ability, and sensitivity. The five new skill dimensions

are oral communication, organizational ability, results orientation, setting leadership direction, teamwork/team leadership, and written communication. The SAS skill dimensions and indicators emphasize students, curriculum and instruction, collaboration, and the management of change. The new skill dimensions are evident throughout the SAS program, from the needs assessment that participants complete before the training session through goal setting, the simulation, and the feedback process.

The *Springfield* program provided practicing administrators to serve as mentors for a group of four or five participants. Although this relationship was often beneficial, it could be difficult to provide sufficient mentors, and geographic locations sometimes made follow-up difficult. In addition, some mentors expressed concerns about the value of their roles during the training program. SAS provides a choice, calling for mentors or peer coaches. The peer-coaching component supports the participants as they build coaching relationships and make plans to continue them during the follow-up activities.

Springfield focused on "contemporary" school issues that were appropriate for the time when Springfield was written (e.g. staff morale, school closings, drug problems, etc.). SAS incorporates current issues with a strong emphasis on curriculum and instruction, collaboration, parent education, and dealing with change. For example, in the *Springfield* simulation, the in-baskets and the resignation of the superintendent provided the context for the day. In SAS, the threat of a school district reclassification by the state and redesigned in-baskets that include student achievement data, safety issues and other contemporary issues drive the simulation. Although student performance in the district is "above average," a pattern of decline that has aroused the attention of state officials. The roles in the *Springfield* simulation were traditional roles: principals, assistant principals,

and central office administrators. The *SAS* organizational chart includes those roles but adds a co-principal, area supervising principals, staff development specialists, and central office generalists.

Springfield allowed twenty (20) participants to practice skills in a safe environment. Three *Springfield* principals received a visit from a highly emotional parent. *SAS* expands the opportunities. *SAS* accommodates fifteen (15) to twenty-five (25) participants, and every participant receives a visit from an individual who is concerned about a serious issue: a representative of the teachers' organization, a patron of the arts, a parent of exceptional children, a parent concerned about instruction in technology, and a parent concerned about school safety. Because these interactions are less emotionally charged, participants have a more realistic opportunity to practice skills than was possible during the emotional confrontations in *Springfield*. The SAS visits are also designed so that only five outside role players are needed.

New features. Several improvements were made beginning with the pre-work that is sent to participants before the training program. SAS calls for simplified participant data, requesting only the information that will be used to make training assignments and communicate with the participants. *Springfield* did not use on-the-job feedback for the participants, but SAS incorporates a 360-degree survey to provide on-the-job feedback regarding the participants' attitudes, beliefs, and values. During *Springfield*, trainers presented a module on adult learning. In *SAS*, adult learning theory is not specifically "taught," but it is applied and modeled throughout the program. For example, a cooperative learning format, the jigsaw, is used to "teach" the eight skill areas, replacing Springfield's "lecture" format and transparencies.

Next Steps

The new *21st Century School Administrator Skills* Program (*SAS*) has been piloted extensively. Participant feedback indicates that the developers were successful in creating an effective simulation-based development program for new and potential school administrators. The simulation addresses current school improvement issues. For those interested in using *SAS* to develop school leaders, materials will be available through NASSP's Office of Leadership Development and Assessment after December 1, 1998.

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Table 1

From *Springfield* to SAS: The Refinements

Springfield	SAS
The program focused on a set of generic leadership skills that were linked to the NASSP assessment process.	The program focuses on current national standards (ISLLC) and New NASSP Assessment Skills.
The needs analysis focused on the NASSP assessment skills.	The needs assessment also focuses on current national standards (ISLLC).
In *Springfield,* some participants had the opportunities to act out leadership behaviors and observe others in action.	In SAS, every participant has the opportunity to act and observe skill behaviors.
Springfield involved practicing administrators as mentors for the participants.	SAS provides the option of using mentors or peer coaches.
Springfield stressed the process of goal setting using the in-basket materials.	SAS has simplified the goal-setting process. Any skills can be practiced in any of the roles.
Springfield allowed 20 participants to practice skills in a safe environment.	SAS allows 15 to 25 participants to practice skills in a safe environment.
Springfield focused on contemporary issues (e.g. staff morale, school closings, student drug problems, etc.)	SAS incorporates updated issues and a strong focus on instruction: teaching and learning, students as the top priority, collaboration with stakeholders, parent involvement and education, dealing with change. In-baskets have been revised to reflect these changes.
The resignation of the superintendent set the tone for *Springfield.*	The threat of a school district takeover sets the tone for SAS.
Springfield roles were typical of traditional district organizational patterns – principals, assistant principals, and central office administrators.	SAS roles reflect emerging organizational structures: principals, co-principals, assistant principals, supervising principals, staff development specialists, and central office generalists.
Three *Springfield* principals received a realistic visit from a highly emotional parent.	Every SAS participant receives a visit from an individual concerned about a serious issue: a representative of a professional organization, a patron of the arts, a parent of exceptional students, a parent concerned about technology, and a parent with safety concerns. These interactions allow for more meaningful skill practice.

Table 1 (Continued)

After the *Springfield* simulation, participants completed a written analysis of the simulation and provided written feedback for themselves and others.	After SAS, participants complete a reflective review of the simulation and provide feedback for others that is more appropriate for the time and energy levels of the participants.
Springfield did not formally address written communication skills for all participants.	SAS provides an opportunity for participants to review what they wrote during the simulation and discuss their skills with a peer coach or mentor.
Small group feedback sessions on the third day provided opportunities to give and receive skill-specific feedback.	SAS adds structure to the facilitator's role and reduces the size of the groups, increasing the quality of the feedback and shortening the training day.

Table 2

From *Springfield* to SAS: New Features

Springfield	SAS
Springfield contained a module on adult learning theory.	Instead of teaching the theory, SAS applies and models adult learning theory in the learning activities.
Springfield did not utilize on-the-job feedback.	SAS pre-work includes a 360-degree survey to provide on-the-job perspectives of participants' attitudes, beliefs, and values.
The preliminary paperwork included participant data that was not always used.	SAS removes requests for role preferences and simplifies the participant data form.